



# Take Time to Learn the Job

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It is distinctly an honor to be on the board of an Indiana public library. You set the direction for a very important municipal corporation (IC36-1-2-10). You will govern the expenditure of thousands of dollars and be responsible for many more thousands of dollars of library assets (IC36-12-9 thru 12). The community has trusted you with their property. Your peers have said they believe you have the skills to govern the library and they trust you to do that. You are therefore referred to as a trustee.

*“Board membership is an acquired skill that must be learned, honed to a sharp edge and regularly updated.”*

What a privilege it is to sit in a seat so powerful that you make decisions that affect the lives of so many people who use the library now and many more who will benefit from a good library far into the future.

But being a library board member is not all honor and privilege. It's hard work and sometimes you'll have to look hard to find the rewards for your efforts. A major factor that makes the job so tough is that board members rarely come to the job well prepared to do it.

Library board members come to the job as community leaders with the best of intentions. But good intentions aren't enough. Humans are not born with an ability to be good board members. Board membership is an acquired skill that must be learned, honed to a sharp edge and regularly updated.

You have two major challenges facing you as a board member. The first is to do the task of governing this library (IC36-12-3-3). You'll plan, monitor things like finance and services, evaluate the progress of the library on long-range goals and a hundred other things to keep this library viable and moving.

The second major task is equally important. You must become a part of the board team and keep it functioning at an optimum level. If you and the other board members don't do a good job of building and maintaining your skills of teamwork and good board membership, you won't be able to accomplish the first task--governing the library.

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The intent of this manual is to help you with both tasks.

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**Learn these  
things first**

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As you gain experience on this board, you will continue to learn facts, statistics, history, procedures and a thousand other things. But first things first:

- **Get to know the other people who serve on this board** with you--not just their names, but who they really are. Where do they live? What are their occupations? Do they have families? What are their real interests and concerns? What motivates them to serve on this board?

Team-building begins by knowing your teammates. Governance cannot happen without team effort.

- **Get to know the director**, the other part of the board team. There must be a very high level of trust between those who govern the library and the person they have chosen to manage. Board members and director form the board team.



- **Learn that this job deserves your very best effort.** You come to the board as an amateur, but you must do the job in the most professional manner possible. Although you are a volunteer, the governance of the library demands the best job you can do. If you can't offer that, let someone else have your position at the table.

- **Learn to learn.** Learning this job is a continuing process. Ongoing development activities should be part of the plan for every board and every board member. Attend state and national library conferences, take part in board development workshops, read pertinent literature about the library and about governance of the library.

There is no such thing as knowing all you need to know about this complex job of governing this complex operation.

- **Learn where to go for answers to your questions.** Your best defense against being totally lost at this early stage of your term as a board member is to know the people and resources that will give you answers to the tough questions quickly.

The director and another board member or the board president

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are your best guides to the ways of the library. This manual is designed to be your guide to the basics of good board membership and will answer many of your questions.

You will learn about the library and how it works for as long as you remain on this board. But you can't wait to learn some information that will be very useful in governing this organization. Here are a few questions that should be answered in your board member orientation:

- 1) What is the written mission statement of this library?
- 2) What are the long-range goals of this library?
- 3) When was this library organized and what is the service area?
- 4) How many citizens does this library serve?
- 5) How big is the annual budget?
- 6) What are the total assets of this library?
- 7) What facilities and equipment does the library own or rent?
- 8) What is the total indebtedness of this library?
- 9) Where does the money come from to finance this library?
- 10) Who has appointed the board members and for what terms of office?
- 11) Who are the current officers of the board?
- 12) How are the board officers elected?
- 13) How long has the present director held this position?
- 14) What training does the director have for managing this library?
- 15) How many staff does the library have and what do they do?
- 16) Are board members reimbursed for expenses, and, if so, how?
- 17) Are board members paid?



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18) What local/state/national legislative issues could affect the library?

19) What have been the major problems faced by this library since it was organized?

20) Has this library or the board ever been involved in litigation?

21) What major problems does the library currently face?

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***Learn more  
about the  
library from  
these  
important  
documents:***

You can learn much about how the library works by looking at its paper-work. Ask the director or board president to show you copies of these documents and to explain those you don't understand.

- 1) A list of board members, their addresses and phone numbers
- 2) Resolution of establishment
- 3) Bylaws of board procedure and management
- 4) The written mission statement of the library
- 5) The long-range plan of the library
- 6) Board member job description
- 7) Board policies and procedures
- 8) Annual calendar of major board and library activities
- 9) Annual budget approval calendar
- 10) The current budget
- 11) Financial reports for the past year
- 12) Director job description
- 13) The process and the instrument used to evaluate the director
- 14) Organizational chart

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- 15) Annual reports for the last five years
  - 16) Minutes of the library board meetings for the past year
  - 17) Major contracts the library has with other public or private agencies
  - 18) Committees, committee job descriptions and current committee members
  - 19) Library brochures or pamphlets
  - 20) Any documents that report the history of the library



***Being a Board Member is...***

***...a Privilege***

***...an Honor***

***...Hard Work***

***...Rewarding***

***...Fun***

